Ep #223: The Gap Between What You Want and What You're Willing to Do

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Carrie Holland, MD, CPT

Strong Is a Mindset, a podcast with Carrie Holland, MD, CPT

Ep #223: The Gap Between What You Want and What You're Willing to Do

This is the *Strong Is a Mindset* podcast, Episode #223. What happens when you want a result, but you're not willing to make the changes that could help you get there? Today, we're talking about the uncomfortable gap between what you want, what you're willing to do, and what you can reasonably expect as an outcome.

This is the *Strong Is a Mindset* podcast, where you'll learn how to build both a strong body and a strong mind by eating, moving, and thinking. I'm your host Physician, Personal Trainer, Certified Health Coach and Certified Life Coach, Carrie Holland.

Hey, how are you? What's new? What's good? So, what's good here? Well, recently, I stumbled across something James Clear wrote, and I have not stopped thinking about it. So if you're not familiar with James Clear, he wrote the New York Times bestseller Atomic Habits. I have read this book a number of times because it is just that good. And if you've ever worked with me, you know what I'm gonna say. Chapter two, the chapter on identity and habits, that chapter really is everything.

I have read and reread and underlined and highlighted that chapter because it is so essential if you want to understand anything about changing your habits. So this passage I came across went like this. "It doesn't make sense to continue wanting something if you're not willing to do what it takes to get it. If you don't want the lifestyle, then release yourself from the desire. To crave the result but not the process is to guarantee disappointment."

And holy cow, that was it. I read that and immediately thought, yep. I have seen that 100%. And then about two seconds later, I thought, yeah. I have most certainly done that too in my career, my relationships, my fitness, all of it. Guilty. And maybe you can relate. I have had conversations with clients who are frustrated that they're not getting any stronger, they're not losing weight, or they're not making progress towards something they really want. And we start to look at what they're currently doing and what might

need to change. But every possibility we discuss feels like too much, too inconvenient, or just something they don't wanna do.

And I get that. There are results I want in my own life too, and those results sound amazing when I imagine having them. But then I start thinking about what I'd need to do consistently to pursue those things, and suddenly, I'm a lot less enthusiastic. And that is what really struck me about this quote. It names a mismatch that could be super uncomfortable to admit, And that is you can really, really want an outcome and still be unwilling to do what it takes to pursue it.

But if you keep expecting that same outcome anyway, you are probably going to feel disappointed and frustrated too if we're being honest here. So I also paused at the phrase do what it takes. Because if you take that too far, it can sound like you're supposed to sacrifice anything and everything for a result. And I don't believe that. Sometimes the process you've been told is necessary is not the only way.

And sometimes the cost to reach your goal is really more than what you're willing to give right now. So I want to pull this apart and look at this honestly without turning it into a lecture about trying harder. And the question we're looking at is this. What do you do when you want a result, but the process to get that result does not fit the life you want to live? And I think part of the challenge is that these two things are different.

Wanting the result and being willing to do what it requires. Those are two different things. So you can genuinely want to become stronger, but still not follow a strength training routine with any consistency. You can want to improve the way you eat and still not want to plan meals or change your usual food choices. You can want a different career and still not want to update your resume, make new connections, apply for jobs, or risk starting somewhere new. Those things can all be true at the same time. Because here's what happens. When we think about a result we want, we generally envision it in its most appealing state. Meaning, we see the end result of

feeling strong and confident in our bodies. We imagine what it feels like to feel more comfortable around food. We imagine feeling more fulfilled and happy in a new job.

So we picture what it will feel like to have the result, and that result feels really good. But the process doesn't happen in that idealized future picture. The process happens in your actual messy life, the one that you're living on an ordinary Tuesday when you're tired, work went way longer than you expected, and the workout you planned does not appeal to you at all. So it happens when you need to make a different choice around food even though the choice you usually make is easier or more appealing.

It happens when you have to reach out to someone you don't know super well or hit submit after you've uploaded your CV. That is the part that we don't always picture when we say we want something. So take getting stronger as an example. Wanting to feel strong, that is really easy to understand. You might imagine lifting more weight, feeling more capable of doing things, or noticing that your body looks and feels different, And all of that sounds pretty good.

But becoming stronger, that requires you to train and not just train when you're excited about a new workout program. You have to repeat many of the same exercises week after week, and you have to gradually challenge yourself by picking up heavier weights. You may need to do the workout when you're tired or when you'd prefer to be doing anything else. And even when you do all of that, the progress may be slow enough that you don't even notice it right away. And I get it. This is not an easy sell we're talking about here because the result itself, that is sexy. But the process is anything but. In fact, it's pretty straight up boring.

And the same thing can happen with your career. You may want work that feels more interesting or flexible or meaningful. You can easily imagine yourself in a job that uses more of your strengths, pays you better, or doesn't leave you completely fried at the end of the day. But getting there

might require you to update your resume or reach out to people, apply for positions, or explain why your experience translates into a different role. You may have to be new at something. You may have to hear no. And you may have to do all of that without knowing whether the next application or conversation is even gonna lead you anywhere. That uncertainty, that is part of the process too.

And that is another reason it can be hard to commit to the process. It does not come with a guarantee. You can train consistently without knowing exactly when or if you'll reach a certain strength goal. You can make thoughtful, intentional changes to the way that you eat without knowing if or how your body will respond and whether or not you'll lose the weight. You can submit hundreds of resumes, network with everyone under the sun, and still not get the job you want.

So you are being asked to put in the effort before you know exactly what the outcome is gonna be. And I think that can be super, super hard for high achievers because most high achievers are totally capable of working hard. That is generally not the problem. But we wanna know that if we put in the time and the effort, there will be a clear return on our investment. When we picture the outcome, we tend to picture the reward.

We don't automatically picture the repetition, the inconvenience, uncertainty, or the boredom required along the way. We just want the A at the end of the semester. We just want the promotion after taking on that extra responsibility. We just want the number on the scale to reflect the choices that we've made all week long. But most of the processes we're talking about just don't work that way. You can do the work and still have to wait. You can take the action and get very little immediate feedback. You can follow the plan and still have no guarantee that the exact result you pictured will happen on your preferred timeline. And that doesn't mean your actions don't have impact. They do for sure. Your actions move you closer

to the outcome and make that outcome more likely, but they cannot promise you exactly how or when it will happen.

So now taking all of this into consideration, when you say you want a result, I think there are actually two questions to consider. So first, what would I actually have to do to pursue this? And second, am I willing to do it? Because wanting the result does not automatically make you willing to do what it requires to get it. Desire and willingness, they are very, very different. And while willingness cannot guarantee you the result, you are not gonna make a whole lot of progress without it. And if you keep saying you want something but are repeatedly frustrated by your lack of progress, it may be time to look more closely at what you are actually doing and what you may not be willing to change. And that brings me to something challenging that I hear pretty regularly in coaching. And that is when someone tells me, I have tried everything.

I hear that very often. As in, I have tried every diet. I've tried every workout. Nothing works for me. I cannot lose weight. I don't know why I'm not getting any stronger. I have done everything I can think of, and I'm still not seeing progress. And I can understand the frustration behind those statements. By the time someone says she has tried everything, she is generally tired of thinking about the problem. She may have been struggling with it for years, and she has probably spent a whole lot of time researching, planning, starting, stopping, and trying to figure out exactly what she's missing.

So I am not suggesting here that she hasn't put in any time, thought, or effort into it. But sometimes when we look more closely at it, I've tried everything really means I've considered everything. She has read about tracking her food. She's thought about drinking less alcohol. She's considered packing her lunch instead of ordering it every day.

She has looked at multiple exercise programs, saved workouts online, and maybe even joined a few gyms. But considering an option and consistently doing it are two very different things. You may have considered 10 different

ways to change how you eat. But if you tried each one for four days before moving on to the next one, you still may not know whether any one of them would have helped. You may have downloaded several strength training programs. But if you switch programs every couple of weeks or skip the exercises you don't like or rarely increase the weight, you probably haven't given any one approach enough time to show you what it can do.

And I'm not saying that to be mean or to be a jerk. I'm saying that because there is useful information in the difference between something you've thought about, something you've briefly attempted, and something you've consistently practiced. These are not the same thing. And there's another version of this too.

So sometimes you really are working hard, but the work you're doing is not connected to the result you want. So meaning, you wanna feel better, so you buy supplements, drink more water, and try to squeeze in another workout. But you're regularly sleeping five hours a night, and you aren't willing to make any changes to your evening schedule to get more sleep, which is probably what you need over the supplements. Or maybe you want to lose weight, and you're making thoughtful choices at breakfast and lunch. So you're eating more protein and veggies. You're prioritizing lean protein.

But you don't wanna look closely at the portions you eat at dinner or how often you're drinking or the restaurant meals on the weekend or the snacks that you pick at throughout the evening. That doesn't mean the things you are doing don't matter. They may be working for you and support your health in all kinds of ways. But if they are not changing the part of the pattern that is most connected to the result you want, it makes sense that the result may not change much because effort and effectiveness are not always the same thing.

And I think that is really hard to hear when you are already exhausted because you may be doing an incredible amount every day. You're working,

taking care of your family, managing the house, helping everyone else, all while trying to take care of yourself somewhere in the middle of that. So then when someone suggests that you might need to do something differently, your first thought might be, are you kidding me? I'm already doing everything I can. And you might be.

You may be working super hard. But the question is not whether you're working hard in your life as a whole. The question really is whether the actions that will give you this particular result are happening consistently. Because you can be busy, productive, and completely exhausted while still not regularly doing the things that are most likely to improve your health or change how you eat or move you forward. And this is not a criticism of how hard you're working.

This is taking an honest look at where your effort is going. Because at some point, we have to stop calling the lack of progress confusing when in reality, the choices connected to that progress have stayed mostly the same. If you are not getting stronger, what has actually changed in your training? If you want to feel better in your body, what has actually changed about your sleep, stress, food, or recovery? If you want a different career, what steps have you taken beyond thinking about how much you want to leave your current one?

And I'm not asking what you researched, intended to do, or did for three days. I'm asking what has actually changed consistently enough that you would reasonably expect it to produce a different result. And if you look at it this way, your answer may be, honestly, not much. And that may be uncomfortable to admit, but what it does is clear up some of the confusion.

Maybe your body is not mysteriously refusing to respond. Maybe you have not failed at everything. Maybe you do not need a completely different plan. Maybe the result has stayed the same because the actions that would change things have stayed the same too. And once you can see that

clearly, now you've got something to work with. Now you have accurate information about what is happening.

And the next question to consider here is what the result actually requires and whether the process you've attached to it is truly necessary. So now before you hear all of this and decide, fine. I guess I'm just unwilling to do what it takes. Let's slow down a second. Because I want you to see another possibility here.

You may be completely willing to work for the result, but unwilling to follow the particular process that you believe is required to get there. And, again, those are not the same thing. So as an example, you may want to lose weight, but you've convinced yourself that doing that means tracking every bite of food you put into your mouth, never having dessert, cooking all of your meals from scratch, exercising six days a week, and walking around hangry all the time. And if that's what you believe that weight loss requires, it makes total sense that you'd be resistant to it because that sounds miserable.

Or maybe you legitimately want to get stronger, but you think that means joining a gym that you don't like and following an intense five-day program that does not fit your life. So you keep telling yourself you're not committed when really you may just be unwilling to commit to that specific plan. Or think about your career. You may want different work, but you've convinced yourself that changing careers means quitting your job, going back to school, taking a massive pay cut, or starting over completely. But maybe you aren't unwilling to explore something different. Maybe you just don't wanna blow up your entire life in order to do it.

So before you conclude that you don't want the result badly enough, maybe instead ask yourself, does this result truly require the process I've attached to it? Because in most situations, yes, there are generally some requirements that you cannot skirt around. Like, if you wanna get stronger, your muscles need to be challenged consistently over time. If you want to

lose weight, something about the way you eat will probably need to change consistently. If you want a different career, you will likely need to explore some possibilities, talk to people, or apply for something new. But there may be many different ways to meet those requirements.

Getting stronger does not require one specific workout program. Losing weight does not require eliminating every food you like eating. Changing your career does not require quitting your current job today and starting from zero. And the point here is to separate what the result actually requires from one specific strategy that you've decided you have to follow. You may realize that you're willing to pursue the result. You're just not willing to pursue it in the way you thought you had to do it. And if that's true, you may not need to abandon the goal. You may just need a different way of going after it. So now let's go back to James Clear and his quote and the language he used.

Specifically, we're talking about being willing to do what it takes because I think we have to be careful with that phrase. Because do what it takes does not mean do whatever it takes. Meaning, there can be limits on what you are willing to sacrifice in order to get a result. You can want to lose weight and decide that you're not willing to spend your entire day hungry, tracking every bite, and thinking about food. You can want to improve your fitness and decide that you're not willing to keep training through an injury.

You can want to change up your career and decide that you're not willing to give up every evening with your family in order to do it. And those limits do not automatically mean the goal isn't important to you. Instead, those limits mean that the goal exists along with other things that also matter to you, like your physical health, your mental health, relationships, time, or energy. So a goal does not get total authority over your life. And in the same vein, willingness should not be measured by how much suffering you can tolerate.

Ep #223: The Gap Between What You Want and What You're Willing to Do

The person who is willing to endure the most is not necessarily the person who wants the result the most. Okay? There are times when pushing harder is useful. Sure. But there are also times when refusing to continue down a path that's not working for you is necessary.

So the question here is not how much can I force myself to tolerate in order to prove I really want this? Instead, a more helpful question might be, what am I reasonably willing to give in order to pursue this? And what am I not willing to give? So maybe you are willing to change how you eat, but you're not willing to follow a plan that makes food take over your life. Maybe you're willing to train consistently, but you're not willing to ignore pain in order to keep progressing. Maybe you're willing to pursue a new position, but you're not willing to build a career that requires you to be available at all hours.

So while your capacity most definitely matters, so do your values and the rest of your life. This keeps your goal in focus, but keeps it from controlling your every move. And once you know what your limits are, you can stop treating them like evidence that you aren't committed enough. And instead, you can look at it from this lens.

Is there still a reasonable path to the result I want within the boundaries I've created for myself? And from there, once you're clear about the result you want, what it reasonably requires, and what you are and are not willing to do, you've got three basic options in front of you. So first, you can choose to change your action. So in this case, you decide that the result matters enough for you to change something you're currently doing. Now this does not mean that you have to overhaul your entire life.

At the same time, the change needs to be meaningful enough that it gets you closer to your result. So maybe you strength train consistently two to three times a week instead of doing random workouts whenever you can fit them in. Maybe you take an honest look at the snacking you're doing and adjust your meals so you feel more full instead of trying to squeak by on as

little food as possible. Or maybe you apply for the position instead of continuing to think about whether you should apply. So you change something.

Follow through long enough to see what happens and use that result as information to guide your next steps. And then your second option is to change the route. This means you still want the larger result, but you recognize that the current way you're trying to get there does not fit your life. So you find another way to pursue it. So maybe that means you stop following a restrictive eating plan and choose a more moderate approach that you can actually hold up.

Maybe you stop forcing yourself to try and like running and find another way to move consistently instead. Or maybe you extend your timeline because the faster approach is setting you up to fail. And changing the route doesn't mean searching forever for a perfect effortless process because any real change is going to require something from you. Okay? I don't wanna sugarcoat that.

But there may be another approach that fits better with your life, and that's when it makes sense to change your route towards your goal. And then your third option is to change your expectation. So this is where you decide that you are not willing or you do not currently have the capacity to make the changes that the result requires, and you are totally allowed to decide that. But then you also have to acknowledge what that decision means. It means your progress may be slower, or your result may look different, or you put the goal on hold, or you might even decide that you no longer want to pursue the goal at all.

And you can even tell yourself, I still prefer this result, but I'm not making this an active goal right now. I want to work out, but I'm not in a place to change my life to fit this in. I want to eat differently and lose weight, but I'm not in a place where I have the time and energy to put into this. It's not worth the cost to me. And doing that is an honest decision.

Ep #223: The Gap Between What You Want and What You're Willing to Do

It's you being real with yourself, and that is my goal for you. So those are your three options. You can change the action, you can change the route, or you can change your expectation. Now having said all that, I want to point out that there is also an unofficial fourth option, and this is the one that creates the most frustration. I see many, many of the women I work with choose this. They keep doing the same thing, keep expecting a different result, and remain angry or frustrated that nothing is changing. Of all of the options, this is the one that results in the most disappointment because nothing ever gets resolved. Meaning, you still expect to lose the weight. You still expect to become stronger. You still expect to feel better, change careers, or reach whatever result you've been pursuing.

But you haven't changed what you're doing. You haven't chosen another reasonable way to get there, and you haven't adjusted your expectations based on what you're currently willing or able to do. So, essentially, you remain stuck in the same place, but keep thinking to yourself, I should be farther along by now. Nothing works for me. I don't understand why this is so hard.

I'm doing everything I can, or I just need to see some progress. And I understand that frustration. Of course, you want to see progress towards something that matters to you. But here is a hard truth. At some point, we have to stop rejecting every meaningful change and then treat the lack of change like it's an unsolved mystery.

And I know that may sound very blunt, but sometimes we need to call it what it is. If you want to get stronger, but your training has not become more consistent or challenging, well, then it would make sense that you're not getting any stronger. Similarly, if you wanna lose weight, but you're unwilling to make any substantial change to the way you eat, it makes sense that your weight might stay the same. And if you want a different career, but if you haven't explored other options or talked to your network or applied for anything, then it makes sense that your work has not

changed. And none of these outcomes mean something is wrong with you, and it doesn't mean that making a change would guarantee the exact result you want.

Really, what it means is that the choices you are currently making are not producing the result you want. It's really fairly straightforward. It's just not what we want to hear. And if you want something different, something in this equation has to move. You can change what you're doing.

You can find a different route, or you can change what you expect from the choices you're making right now. So you have options. But if you do exactly none of those things, you will keep running into the same problem over and over again. It's the same conflict. You expect one result while repeatedly choosing something that does not get you closer to it, or you do nothing.

And this is when your disappointment can become chronic. Because every day, you're measuring yourself against an outcome you want, but living in a way that is not going to create that outcome. Then instead of recognizing that mismatch, you turn the frustration back onto yourself. You decide you have no discipline. You wonder why you can't get it together, and you make the lack of progress mean that you're failing.

But the lack of progress here isn't proving that something is wrong with you. It's really just showing you that the result you want, the actions you're willing to take, and the outcomes you continue to expect do not currently match. And, yes, you can be disappointed by that. You can wish you are willing to do more. You can wish you had more time, energy, or capacity. You can wish that the process was easier or that it requires less of you. But doing that doesn't resolve the mismatch. Really, it just makes an already frustrating situation that much more challenging.

Now honesty, on the other hand, while that may be super hard, it gives you something to work with. It gives you somewhere to go. So you can say, yes. I want this, and I'm willing to change something. Or you can say, yes. I

want this, and I have to find a different way to go after it. Or you can also say, I would still prefer this result, but I am just not willing to do what it requires right now, so I need to stop expecting it from myself.

And any one of those decisions gives you some direction. The fourth option does not. It just keeps you wanting the result, resisting the changes, expecting the outcome, and frustrated when it doesn't happen. And the goal here, again, it is not to prove that you should be trying harder. Really, it's to stop fighting with the evidence in front of you and make an honest decision about what happens next.

So I'm not gonna give you a five-step process or another lengthy list of questions to answer here if there is a mismatch between the result you want and what you're willing to do to get it. So instead, I want you to think about one result or one goal you keep saying you want, and then ask yourself one question. Based on what I am consistently doing right now, is that result reasonable for me to expect? And I want you to answer that based on what you are actually doing, not what you intend to do or what you've researched or what you tried briefly or what you keep promising yourself you'll start next week. Look at the choices you have been making consistently.

Are those choices supporting the result that you're expecting? And maybe the answer is yes. Maybe you're doing the work and the result is just taking way longer than you intended. And if that's true, maybe you need more patience or more time and not a different plan altogether. Or maybe the honest answer is no. Maybe your current choices and your expectations do not match. And if that's what you see, please don't use it as another reason to attack yourself. Use it to make a decision. You can change what you're doing. You can find a different way to go after the result, or you can adjust what you expect from the choices you're making right now.

That is ownership. And while this kind of ownership and honesty can feel confronting, I actually think it offers hope and a way through. Because once

we can stop treating a lack of progress like a mystery and get really clear on what might actually be causing it, then you can finally decide what you wanna do about it. And that will feel so much more empowering than doing the same thing and being frustrated that nothing is changing. And you may not be able to control exactly how quickly the result happens or whether it looks exactly the way you imagined.

But you can get honest about the choices you're making, what those choices are or are not getting you, and whether those choices are ones you want to keep making. So I want to come back to the James Clear quote that started this whole conversation. He said that if you don't want to live the lifestyle, you should release yourself from the desire. And I don't know that you always have to stop wanting the result because you might still want to lose weight. You might still wanna build muscle or change your career or improve your relationship or accomplish something that matters to you.

But there may be a difference between wanting something and actively choosing it. So you can say, I would still like that result, but I'm not willing or able to make it a priority right now. And that is just being honest. It doesn't mean you can never pursue the goal. Not at all.

It also doesn't mean the door is permanently closed. It just means that you're no longer demanding a result from choices that are not gonna give it to you. And I think what this does is end a whole lot of unnecessary fighting with yourself. Because wanting something does not mean you have to pursue it at any cost. But if you do choose to pursue something like a big change in your lifestyle, your career, or your relationships, you have to be willing to look honestly at what it is going to ask of you.

So maybe the takeaway here is pretty simple. You are allowed to want the result. You are allowed to decide that the cost is too high. You are allowed to go after it in a different way, more slowly, or at another time. Because

getting honest about it may not immediately give you the result you want, but it does give you a place to start.

Alright? And if you want help with this, let's go. When you coach with me, we look honestly at the result you want, what it will require, and what you're willing to change. Then we build a plan that fits your life and helps you actually move forward. Check out my website. Send me a message at www.CarrieHollandMD.com/contact, and let's talk about how coaching can help you close the gap between what you want and what you're actually doing. Alright?

Thank you again for hanging out with me, and I'll catch you again next week.

—

Hey if you want to build muscle but don't know where to start, I've got you covered. Head over to CarrieHollandMD.com/buildstrength and download my free guide to help you maximize your strength training. Inside, you'll find the essential exercises for building muscle, plus simple one, two, and three-day workout plans you can follow with just dumbbells and a bench.

You'll also find strength training tips to help you train smarter and see real results. My goal is to help you get strong and this strength-training guide will help you do it. Go to CarrieHollandMD.com/build strength and check it out.

Thank you for listening to the *Strong Is a Mindset* podcast. If you want to learn more about how to build both a strong mind and a strong body by eating, moving, and most importantly, thinking, check out CarrieHollandMD.com.